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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

COMMENTS ON RACHEL CARSON'S ARTICLES IN THE NEW YORKER

Miss Carson presents a lucid description of the real and potential dangers of misusing chemical pesticides. These are poisonous compounds and, if used improperly, can be dangerous.

The articles serve to alert people to this danger. They also emphasize the need for greater public support of efforts to develop more effective biological and non-chemical pest control techniques, to develop more sophisticated chemicals that will affect only one or two species of pests, and to intensify research on the effect of pesticides on people and animals.

Miss Carson does not advocate halting all use of chemical pesticides. She does advocate the use of the best judgment in selecting the right control method -- whether biological, chemical, or other -- for use in the right way at the right time.

She expresses the concern of many people about the effect of chemical pesticides on birds, animals, and people. We are fully aware of, and share, this concern.

Here are some of the things we are doing to provide needed protection to the public:

1. At the request of the Secretary of Agriculture, a Federal Pest Control Review Board was established in 1961. All pest control programs sponsored by the Federal Government and the cooperating States are reviewed by this Board. Members of the Board include representatives from the Departments of Agriculture, Defense, Interior, and Health, Education and Welfare.

For many years the Department of Agriculture has worked closely with the Public Health Service and the Food and Drug Administration in matters concerning the safe use of pesticides. In carrying out its responsibilities, the Department of Agriculture utilizes the knowledge and judgment of scientists in these agencies of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare concerning the safety to people of pesticides used on foods.

The USDA is responsible for registering all pesticides to be shipped in interstate commerce. To obtain registration pesticide manufacturers or formulators must first prove to USDA that the product, used as directed, will be effective, safe for users, safe for people living in the area, safe for crops and livestock, and safe in respect to residues in foods.

(over)

If any residue will be left on foods when the product is used as directed, the manufacturer must obtain from the Food and Drug Administration a tolerance to cover the residue present. This tolerance sets a legal limit on the amount of the chemical permitted to remain on foods.

2. We will request the Congress to amend the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act to do away with the provision that now permits a company to register a pesticide "under protest" after the Department has denied registration on any question of health or safety.

3. The Department requested an increase of \$250,000 for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 1962, to strengthen its control over pesticides. A good share of this money will be spent to increase the staff of toxicologists and pharmacologists.

4. We are continuing to expand research on methods of controlling insects without the use of chemicals that leave harmful residues. Two-thirds of the Department's research on insects is now devoted to biological controls, use of chemicals specific to a particular insect, attractants, and basic studies of insect physiology and pathology. In the last two years, the Congress appropriated some \$2.9 million for construction of three new USDA laboratories devoted to research on biological control of insects, pesticide residues, and insects affecting man and animals.

Chemical pesticides have helped and will continue to help make possible the better living conditions this nation enjoys. The burst of productivity over the past decade on U. S. farms parallels the increasing use of chemical pesticides. These chemicals have also enabled us to eliminate or to minimize the effects of disease-carrying pests throughout the world.

Without pesticides, many of the foods we take for granted would be luxury items available to only a few.

Commercial apple production would be impossible, as would be the production of eastern grown peaches. Oranges and grapefruit would be subject to infestation by maggots, and the producers of potatoes and tomatoes would lose every second or third crop. The expansion of beef and dairy production in the southeastern section of the country would have been impossible.

Scientists of the Department and cooperating agencies do not claim to know all the chemical and biological effects of these pesticides, for our knowledge is not complete. However, it is substantial and is constantly increasing.

The U. S. Department of Agriculture will continue to exercise strict control over pesticides offered for sale in interstate commerce and will constantly seek better methods to control pests.

August, 1962



